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Date: January 28, 2022

To: MD Secretary of Planning Robert S. McCord  
robert.mccord@maryland.gov

Dear Secretary McCord:

The 54 undersigned organizations from across the state of Maryland and the nation are writing to express our profound concern regarding your actions to dismiss Fred Tutman and others from the Patuxent River Commission, which we believe is outside of your jurisdiction. The justification you articulated to the Baltimore Sun—that Mr. Tutman in particular was not reappointed out of a desire to “have new perspectives added to the commission”—seems short-sighted at best, if not outright disingenuous. The Commission’s enabling legislation clearly states that new “citizen” appointees must be ratified by the Maryland Senate and appointed by Governor Hogan, **we are demanding that these leaders ensure his immediate reinstatement as part of the process.**

As you are well aware, Mr. Tutman has served on the commission since 1996, and it is difficult to imagine anyone who has a greater vested interest in the health of the Patuxent River. As the founding Patuxent Riverkeeper since 2004, his office is located in Upper Marlboro, where Mr. Tutman was born and raised, along the Patuxent, as were seven generations of his ancestors. He still lives on the farm where he grew up, where he grows vegetables, works as a blacksmith and leases cropland on 200 acres.

His perspectives are varied beyond that of a farmer and Prince George’s native son. Mr. Tutman was a broadcast journalist for 25 years before attending law school. Since founding Patuxent Riverkeeper, he has played a role in litigating 19 cases to protect the health of the river and the communities whose lives are intertwined with it. He is an outspoken advocate for environmental justice, and has provided a bullhorn to communities opposing development, particularly minority communities.

He helped these communities by fighting to block construction of a mega-development on watershed farmland, joining a community group’s civil rights complaint accusing the state of Maryland of approving a disproportionate number of power plants near a community where nearly three-quarters of the population is African-American, and, in a precedent-setting win, leading a legal challenge that earned residents and organizations with aesthetic or recreational interest the legal standing to contest proposed development in Maryland.

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“It was Fred who opened our eyes to pollution and environmental issues in general,” says former Eagle Harbor Mayor James Crudup.

It is also documented that you have pushed to quell the Commission’s development discussions, which Mr. Tutman has been at the center of, claiming it was beyond the scope of the Commission’s work. Yet the Commission has been addressing land use issues since it was created in 1980, according to former Secretary of Planning Richard Eberhart Hall.

In our opinion, the Patuxent River Commission simply cannot fulfill its mission without the Riverkeeper’s involvement. Your actions have caused the Commission to lose its credibility in the community and you have fractured what had evolved into a hand-in-glove beneficial relationship between private and public conservation on the Patuxent River. If, as you claim, Fred’s ouster from the Commission is not a reaction to his role as a fierce and unapologetic advocate for environmental justice, then your misguided dismissal of Mr. Tutman should be corrected, and you should advocate with the Commission, the Maryland Senate, and Governor Hogan to make that happen immediately.

We look forward to your response. You can contact me at the address above.

Sincerely,



Betsy Nicholas  
Executive Director  
Waterkeepers Chesapeake  
Betsy@waterkeeperschesapeake.org

CC: Governor Larry Hogan - Keiffer.Mitchell@maryland.gov  
Sen Bill Ferguson - bill.ferguson@senate.state.md.us  
Del. Adrienne A. Jones - adrienne.jones@house.state.md.us  
Sec. Ben Grumbles - ben.grumbles@maryland.gov

Action Information  
Anacostia Riverkeeper  
Arundel Rivers  
Assateague Coastal Trust  
Audubon Naturalist Society  
Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch Group  
Blue Water Baltimore  
Chapman Forest Foundation  
Chesapeake Climate Action Network  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Chesapeake Legal Alliance  
Citizens to Conserve and Restore Indian Creek  
Clean Water Action  
Ecorizons Conservation Consulting  
Edgesville Farm  
Environmental Integrity Project  
Food & Water Watch  
Frack-Free Frostburg  
Friends of Sligo Creek  
Friends of Swann Park  
Friends of Ten Mile Creek & Little Seneca Reservoir  
Friends of the Nanticoke River  
Greenbelt Access Television  
Greenbelt Biota  
Greenbelt Climate Action Network  
Gunpowder RIVERKEEPER  
HoCo Climate Action  
Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake  
Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association  
Maryland Pesticide Education Network  
Maryland Conservation Council  
Mattawoman Watershed Society  
MD Campaign for Environmental Human Rights  
Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association  
Minorities In Aquaculture  
Montgomery Countryside Alliance  
Mountain Maryland Movement  
Namati  
Potomac Conservancy  
Potomac Riverkeeper Network  
Prince George's County Sierra Club  
Protect Our Stream Long Reach  
Proud Union Retirees of Western Maryland  
Safe Skies Maryland  
SAVE BARC-STOP the BEP  
Shenandoah Riverkeeper  
ShoreRivers  
Southern Maryland Audubon Society  
SouthWings  
St. Mary's River Watershed Association  
Upper Potomac Riverkeeper  
Waterkeeper Alliance

Wicomico Environmental Trust